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ABSTRACT

Guided by the belief that impressions of communication competence are based on observations of behavior appropriate to a particular context and on inferences about others' capabilities and motivations, a study was undertaken to (1) examine the relationship between self perceptions and other perceptions, (2) discover the role of motivation in behavior manifestation, and (3) examine the impact of knowledge on impressions of communication competence. Forty-one college students were asked to complete a 25-item version of the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (a self-report measure) and the Communication Competence Self-Report Questionnaire (a 38-item measure of behavioral ability). To derive a measure of communication competence, students were asked to complete the Communication Competency Assessment Instrument. Results showed that all students did not perceive their behavior as others perceived them. Students seemed to have a somewhat accurate view of their ability to defend and express a point of view, but a somewhat inaccurate view of their introduction behaviors. Little or no relationship existed between knowledge and self-reported competence and between knowledge and motivation. (HOD)

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CONCEPTUALIZING COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE: DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH AND INSTRUCTION

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CONCEPTUALIZING COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE: DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH AND INSTRUCTION

Communication competence is a social construction. Competence is not located within the individual. Like source credibility (which often includes competence as one dimension) communication competence is an impression based on perception. Individuals use whatever knowledge and skills (accumulated behaviors that have proved successful) they have, in varying degrees of intensity (motivation), to behave in ways which may be judged along a competent-incompetent continuum in a particular context. Thus judgments about an individual's level of communicative competence are based on perceptions of behavior.

Definitional clashes have occurred in the past between those who see competence as an impression and those who view it as inherent. Chomsky (1965) believed that individuals are born with an innate knowledge of linguistic principles. His notion that competence and performance were distinctly separate follows logically from this theoretic position. Argyris (1962, 1965) viewed interpersonal competence in an organization to be based on capacity, fitness or ability, all internal factors. Many theorists still view communication competence as an inherent entity, something distinctly unique and separate from behavior.

Today, the cognitive and behavioral components of competence are emphasized in many different research directions. McCroskey (1982), in adopting the definition of Larson et al. (1978), enlarges this perspective to include cognitive, behavioral and

affective components. Duran and Wheeless (1980) focus on social management and see competence as having cognitive and behavioral dimensions where adaptability is the key to competence. Backlund sees competence as "the ability to demonstrate a knowledge of the socially appropriate communicative behavior in a given situation." But how does one demonstrate knowledge? Or does one demonstrate knowledge? The problem with past definitions is that knowledge is not directly observable. When impressions of competence are formed, people behave and knowledge is inferred from this behavior.

Some have tried to operationalize competence by focusing on accuracy (e.g., Krauss & Glucksberg, 1969), effectiveness (e.g., Hale, 1980; Brandt, 1979), and goal attainment (e.g., Wiemann, 1977). The problem with this approach is it becomes a never-ending task to identify the essence of competence, and the new constructs that are created (e.g., accuracy, etc.) are unique instances of behavior that involve the researcher's perceptions of competent communication. What is needed is a more global, other-centered, view of communication competence, one that does not focus on the unknown (knowledge), but on the known (behavior).

Thus, to attempt such a definition, communication competence is an impression of one's own or another's communicative behavior. This impression is based on perceptions of behavioral skills (behaviors that have proved successful and are used successfully over time), judgments about motivation (inclination) to use these skills, inferences about the knowledge (understanding

of communication principles) held about these skills, and how appropriate (which may or may not entail a perception of accuracy or effectiveness) the behavior appears within context. The entire impression is based on actual behavior and inferences about the communicator's internal state. The goal of the communication scholar, then, is to understand: (1) how individuals arrive at these impressions (see Norton's work on communicator style), (2) how people feel about the outcomes of communication (see Hecht's work on communication satisfaction), and (3) how people can create behaviors to influence impressions (see Rubin's 1983 volume on skill improvement).

Metatheoretical Foci of Competence Research

To better understand the conceptual difficulties facing communication research in this area, one can examine the metatheoretical foci of past research. Gerald Miller (1978) has proposed four perspectives followed by scholars to examine interpersonal communication which have some relevance to communication competence research. According to Miller, the Situational Approach attempts to identify and distinguish among and between intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, public, and mass communication settings. For example, studies of effectiveness in small group communication (e.g., Bradley, 1980) become more concerned with factors involved in being perceived as competent in leadership positions rather than how individuals go about taking others' perspectives. The literature on communication competence has moved beyond this definitional stage to a more eclectic approach, recognizing that appropriateness is context bound.

Situational appropriateness, as a key component in communication competence, has a number of sub-components. The situation places demands on behavior and helps define what is or is not appropriate. Similarly, societal norms mandate certain behaviors and the individual's ability to understand these norms and act accordingly manifests itself in appropriate behavior. A person's goal or intended effect of communication is also a factor used in communication, sometimes related to relationship definition or construction. And so on. The complex nature of what is or is not appropriate, therefore, has a number of individual and social roots. Some researchers focus on the dimensions of situations (Cody, 1978; Cody & Jordan, 1979; Knapp, 1978; Powell, 1980). We may never be able to delineate all of these in order to specify a context in which communication competence can be measured with total certainty, but it is possible to look for general social conventions and create contexts in which individuals act so that a tentative assessment is possible.

Following the situational metatheoretical position, communication competence research has identified interpersonal (Wiemann, 1977; Bochner & Kelly, 1974), relational (Spitzburg, 1981, 1982, 1983), social (Duran & Wheeless, 1980), rhetorical (Clark & Delia, 1979; Hart, Carlson, & Eadie, 1980), intercultural (Ruben, 1976), organizational (Monge, Bachman, Dillard & Eisenberg, 1982; Harris & Cronen, 1976; Sypher & Sypher, 1981; Walters & Snavely, 1981), mass media (Ploghoft, 1981) and educational (Rubin, 1982a) contexts. The methodological problem of determining what to examine within these contexts has not progressed very far. Most

of the investigations have focused on or included interpersonal and/or public speaking behaviors. It seems to be a never-ending task identifying all skills necessary in a particular context (see, for example, Allen & Brown, 1976; Muchmore & Galvin, 1980; DiSalvo & Steere, 1980). It is most important to keep in mind that ranges of behaviors exist and impressions of communication competence are based on individual judgments of appropriateness. The Developmental Approach to interpersonal theory (Miller, 1978) emphasizes the importance of social conventions and norms in settings where individuals are strangers and examines how relationships change to focus more specifically on psychological information. Over time, rules are created between participants and these, then, guide interaction. Identification of rules of social interaction are useful when understanding how impressions of interpersonal competence are formed. The use of such an approach in a relational communication context, methodologically, mandates examination of relationships over time. Naturalistic observation would allow identification of social norms and adherence to conventions, however, rules created by and for the participants in the later stages of development become so individualistic that competence would be difficult to assess. Understanding how these qualitative changes manifest themselves in individual cases can prove interesting in therapeutic situations, but they do not, necessarily, add to a comprehensive understanding of how competence develops.

The Law-Governed Approach to competence identifies regularities, based on if-then statements (as in the physical sciences).

Antecedent conditions and predicted outcomes are specified so that effectiveness can be predicted from identifiable behaviors. We've come to realize that one if-then statement does not a process view of communication make. Combinations of if-then propositions (best conceived of as if-then-then-then, etc.), though, provide a basis for most pedagogical tenets. For example, if you follow the motivated sequence in a speech, then you will, most likely, persuade. If you raise the pitch of your voice at the end of a statement and begin the statement with an interrogative pronoun, then it will be perceived as a question. Semantic and syntactic conventions provide some regularity for predicting impressions of competence. Breaking of these conventions (as with Black English) is seen as appropriate in some contexts and not appropriate in others.

In the laws-governed approach, there are many factors for which we cannot account: motivation, feedback, demands of the situation, knowledge of the receivers, etc. The processual, developmental nature of communication is implied, but unworkable. This is unfortunate because assessment of communication competence is more valid, if not more reliable, when laws are identified and appropriate behaviors defined prior to observing behavior and judging the behavior's appropriateness vis a vis these laws. Thus, the laws-governed approach provides us with objectivity and helps us understand how impressions of communication competence are formed.

The Rules-Governed Approach states that people create rules and agree to accept them as guiding principles of their relationships. There is never complete consensus on what constitutes

these rules, but by studying two individuals one can identify the unique nature, structure, procedures and content of an interaction. Harris & Cronen (1976) used this approach to studying organizational communication competence; individuals were asked to identify the organization's grand scheme. Ability to correctly perceive the rules and adapt to them was thought to lead to effective performance. Spitzburg (1983) argues that the relational approach is most appropriate for assessment of relational communication competence. Perhaps it is. But this allows us to understand how individuals come to establish relationships with others, but does not allow us to identify regularities of behavior or understand how people come to an impression of communication competence.

These four perspectives point to why we're having so much trouble defining and measuring communication competence. Theoretically, our philosophical leanings guide our conceptual and methodological directions. Those following the situational approach come to realize that it is difficult to identify each and every communication situation; harder still, it is impossible to determine elements of effectiveness without considering a wide variety of interaction principles. Developmentalists find it hard to generalize past initial interactions (and the social conventions governing these) to elements of relationship development. Researchers investigating relational and interpersonal communication competence have progressed to the point of classifying dimensions through which relationships pass and conceptual

elements of the process, but instruments are still on the individual basis, rather than on a relationship basis. Laws-governed followers find it easier to specify the known relationships between behaviors and probable effects, but are concerned that some processual concerns are invisible to the eye. And rules theorists are not very concerned with measurement that leads to generalization at all; they're more interested in understanding how the rules are created in the first place.

I suggest we move beyond these four perspective camps to a more global understanding of competence that focuses on behavior. That is, what social norms, laws and rules are found and followed in communication situations that lead to impressions of communication competence? These have been the focus of our discipline for many years. It is now time to organize our thinking around a more global concept of competence that is focused on what we can observe. To demonstrate, I shall use a most-familiar context, the educational context, as an example and examine how impressions of communication competence are formed in the educational setting. I shall focus on social norms, laws, and interactional rules demanded by the context to explain how impressions of appropriateness and competence are formed.

Searching for Basic Elements

My work with this particular context grew out of a felt need (within an institution) to develop an impression of students' communication competence. There were two ultimate goals: (1) to increase students' skills and abilities so that others' impressions of the students' skills would increase accordingly, and (2)

to help students be more functionally competent in this particular context. Returning to our original definition, this means that impressions of communication competence are based on observations of behavior appropriate to a particular context and inferences about others' capabilities and motivations which are seen as underlying dimensions of competence.

In the creation of an assessment instrument, behavioral expectations within and appropriate to the college setting had to be considered. That is, a range of situations exist, which had to be identified, analyzed, and evaluated. It was important that this range represent the college experience as it relates to learning. Also, there had to be a conceptual base for assessment. Our understanding of social norms, laws governing communication appropriate to the setting, and rules generic to interactions that can be generalized (rather than those only relevant to a particular interaction between two people), had to be sophisticated enough for the creation of such an assessment instrument.

Once this conceptual base was established, various assessment methods were considered. Naturalistic observation would have been the ideal methodological tool. However, following students and finding out how others perceived their communication seemed impractical. Self-report measures, while easy to administer, are based on one's assessment of one's own behavior. It is logical that high self-monitors would perceive their behaviors in a fashion similar to other observers (as purported by Snyder, 1974; Snyder, 1978; Turner, 1980), given an understanding of what constitutes appropriate behavior (knowledge). However, the same

relationship would not necessarily exist for all students. Other-report methods (such as expert judgments) were more feasible and valid (since they are more consistent with the definition of communication competence). Instead of using instructors' impressions (which may vary in terms of criteria used for the impression), a reliable other-report method was created that specified criteria on which impressions were to be formed.

In the procedure, a situation (actually 14) is created to set up the context and provide additional information on appropriateness of the behavior that is requested. Behavior that is adapted to the situation and is appropriate, then, provides the basis for the perception (assessment). The methodological problem of operationalizing impressions of each of these behaviors forced categories ranging in degree of appropriateness (most to least). The end result, a total impression is arbitrarily summed from each behavioral sequence.

To test this conceptual position, a study was undertaken during Spring 1983 with three purposes in mind: (1) to examine the relationship between self perceptions and other perceptions; (2) to discover the role of motivation in manifestation of behavior; and (3) to examine the impact of knowledge in impressions of communication competence.

Methods

Forty-one students, randomly selected from an introductory course at a large midwestern university, reported to the Communication Research Center and completed two questionnaires and one

behavioral analysis. From a random starting point, the three measures were presented to the subjects in a counterbalanced manner so that order effects would be eliminated.

To derive a measure of communication competence (based on behavior), subjects were given the Communication Competency Assessment Instrument (CCAI) (Rubin, 1982). In this procedure, students are asked to give a persuasive speech, listen to a videotaped lecture and answer questions about it, and respond appropriately in situations familiar to the student. The behaviors elicited by the various "probes" were assessed by graduate students skilled in the rating technique. Each of the 19 behaviors assessed are rated on a scale ranging from 5 (most appropriate) to 1 (least appropriate). The total score constitutes a measure of behavioral propriety.

During the same session, students were asked to complete two further questionnaires: (1) McCroskey's (1970) 25-item version of the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA), a personal report measure (used here to assess motivation to communicate), and (2) the Communication Competence Self Report (CCSR) questionnaire, a 38-item self-report measure of behavioral ability. Statements found on the CCSR mirrored the competencies assessed in the CCAI. For each of the CCAI items, one statement on the CCSR described very appropriate behavior, while one described inappropriate behavior (similar to the "5" and "1" points in the CCAI manual). Students were asked to determine how often (ranging from "always" to "never") the statement describes their own behaviors. Examples are:

I mispronounce a lot of words
When I speak with others, my ideas are clearly and concisely presented.
I understand the assignments that are given orally in class.
When I try to describe someone else's point of view, I have trouble getting it right.

The CCSR items were then subjected to coefficient alpha analysis. The alpha for the 38 items was .90. When the least consistent items of each 2-statement pair were eliminated, the coefficient alpha was .87. Statements were recoded so that a high score represented the most appropriate and high-skill behavior category. Then the resultant 19 items were totalled to provide a measure of self-reported communication competence which was consistent with the 19-item CCAI, an other-reported measure.

Since perceptions of knowledge are often inferred from behavior, it was necessary to operationalize knowledge. Choice of any knowledge test of communication concepts is problematic. The most valid measure of students' knowledge, here, was what they learned in the course, so students' grades on their three examinations in the course were totalled and a mean knowledge grade derived for each student. These grades did reflect, to an unknown degree, their knowledge of the course content.

Results

The first set of analyses aimed to uncover the relationships existing among judgments of behavioral appropriateness made by others (competence), judgments made by the individual (self-report), knowledge, and motivation. Table 1 shows a small (.30) but significant correlation between the CCSR and the CCAI, indicating that students' impressions of their own communication

competence is not wholly consistent with how they are actually perceived by others. Table 2 shows that only two of the 19 items correlated significantly. Students seemed to have a somewhat accurate view of their ability to defend and express a point of view, but a somewhat inaccurate view of their introduction behaviors.

TABLE 1

CORRELATIONS AMONG VARIABLES

	CCAI	CCSR	KNOWLEDGE
CCSR	0.30*		
KNOWLEDGE	0.52***	-0.07	
PRCA	-0.37**	-0.62***	0.02

* p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.0001

Table 1 also shows a somewhat higher correlation (.37) between motivation (as measured by the PRCA self-report measure) and competence (other-reported). More substantial correlations exist between the knowledge measure and the competence measure (.52) and between self-reported competence and motivation (.62). That is, behaviors judged by others correlate to a moderate degree as do self-reported measures. Little or no relationship exists between knowledge and self-reported competence and between knowledge and motivation.

TABLE 2

CORRELATION OF CCAI & CCSR ITEMS

	CCAI Mean	CCSR Mean	r
Pronunciation	4.12	3.83	.10
Facial Expression/Tone of Voice	3.88	3.51	.11
Clear Articulation	3.90	3.83	.17
Persuasiveness	3.41	3.83	.12
Clarity of Ideas	3.59	3.61	.13
Defend & Express a Point of View	3.46	3.90	.27*
Recognize Misunderstanding	3.71	3.73	.12
Distinguish Fact from Opinion	3.49	4.02	.22
Understand Suggestions	2.73	3.70	-.03
Identify Class Assignment	3.17	4.00	.23
Summarize	3.02	3.34	.11
Introduce Self to Others	4.07	3.83	-.27*
Obtain Information	3.71	3.49	.03
Answer Questions	3.63	3.78	-.03
Express Feelings	3.53	3.66	.05
Organize Messages	3.41	3.37	.18
Give Directions	2.66	3.95	.13
Describe Another's Viewpoint	3.29	3.54	-.01
Describe Differences of Opinion	2.73	3.56	.21

* $p<.05$ (5 = high skill, 1 = low skill)

Since it appeared that perceptions of others' behaviors are related to the others' knowledge and self-reported apprehension, a regression analysis was performed on the data. As indicated in Table 3, it appears that impressions of competence can be predicted from students' knowledge levels and self-reports of apprehension. Those high in knowledge and low in apprehension appear to behave in a way that is evaluated more positively by the raters.

TABLE 3

MULTIPLE REGRESSION: KNOWLEDGE AND MOTIVATION AS PREDICTORS OF COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

	b	t
Knowledge	.53	4.30**
Motivation	-.38	-3.08*

$F = 13.67^{**}$

$df = 2/38$

Multiple $R = .65^{**}$

$R^2 = .42$

* $p < .005$ ** $p < .0001$

The low correlation between observed behavior and motivation (from Table 1) strengthens the conception that one is not totally related to the other. Behaviors may not accurately reflect apprehension. To examine further communication competence of students with various degrees of apprehension and knowledge,

scores on these variables were split at the median and groups formed of high apprehensive/high knowledge, low apprehensive/high knowledge, high apprehensive/low knowledge, and low apprehensive/low knowledge students. Their mean communication competence scores were then compared. Table 4 reports a significant one-way analysis of variance ($F = 3.05$, $df = 3/37$, $p < .05$) where high knowledge/low apprehensives scored significantly higher on the CCAI than did low knowledge/high apprehensives.

TABLE 4

MEAN COMPETENCE RATINGS

	MOTIVATION	
KNOWLEDGE	Low Apprehension	High Apprehension
High Knowledge	70.33*	68.50
Low Knowledge	64.00	58.00*

$F = 3.05$, $df = 3/37$, $p < .05$

Means with asterisks differ significantly via the Tukey-B procedure ($p < .05$)

Discussion

The results clearly show that all students do not perceive their behaviors as others perceive them. In fact, the .30 correlation in this investigation may very well be a function of creating the CCSR directly from the CCAI. Other self-report measures of behavior may not correlate as highly as the CCAI did.

In particular, scales that combine behavioral items with attitudinal items (such as that proposed by Wiemann, 1977) may show even less of a relationship. Past research (Hewes, Haight, & Szalay, 1976; Norton, 1978) has found the same incongruence between self- and other-report data for different measures. However, Daly (1978) argues that self-reports of behaviors are consistent with actual behaviors; his behavioral measure, though, is actually of the self-report variety and would be expected to correlate with other self-report measures.

One interesting outcome of this study is the possibility that some people have more accurate perceptions of their behaviors than others. High self-monitors (i.e., those with a high correlation between CCSR and CCAI) may be able to analyze the outcome of their actions and take the perspective of the other. As Snyder (1979, p. 89) explains:

> The prototypic High Self-Monitoring Individual is one who, out of concern for the situational and interpersonal appropriateness of his or her social behavior, is particularly sensitive to the expression and self-presentation of relevant others in social situations and uses these cues as guidelines for monitoring (that is, regulating and controlling) his or her own verbal and nonverbal self-presentation.

Snyder's (1974) scale consists of twenty-five statements concerning one's style of self-presentation. Others (Dabbs, Evans, Hopper & Purvis, 1980) suggest that high self-monitors are better at influencing others and are more verbal than low self-monitors and that ratings of their humor (Turner, 1980) are more accurate. Future research is now investigating the relationship between the self-monitoring scale and the self-report measure used here.

The study also demonstrates the role of knowledge and motivation in the act of behaving in a way that is judged as competent in a particular situation. Since inferences about knowledge and motivation are made when competence impressions are formed, it is reassuring to see that a relationship does exist. Cronkhite and Liska (1980) express the same point of view in their conclusions about impressions of source credibility:

> When one really begins to consider how much information is available on which to make judgments of others, it is easy to see we are not dealing with a process in which impressions must be fabricated from fleeting snatches of experience. There is no question that we sometimes do construct our views of others somewhat independently of what we actually observe, but it is also clear that that does not happen by default. (p. 113)

The source credibility literature is particularly pertinent to the study of communication competence. While competence and trustworthiness were often considered the main dimensions of credibility, perceptions of acceptability are often situation-bound. Cronkhite and Liska's view of credibility mirrors the definition of competence proposed here, indicating that the same sort of processes are used in these perceptions:

> The conceptualization we have in mind is one in which an individual attributes certain unobservable characteristics to others on the basis of observed characteristics. The individual then evaluates the others by comparing these attributed characteristics to criteria for desirable communicators which have been derived from the needs/goals which are salient in the specific communication situation. (1980, p. 105)

When the needs and goals of a specific communication situation are created and people are asked to behave in a manner appropriate to the demands of the situation, using their

knowledge of rules, laws, and appropriate communication conventions, then impressions of communicative competence can be assessed in a reliable manner. That is, judgments about appropriateness of behavior, based on criteria, can be formed and these, then, can help determine further instructional needs.

Instructional Implications

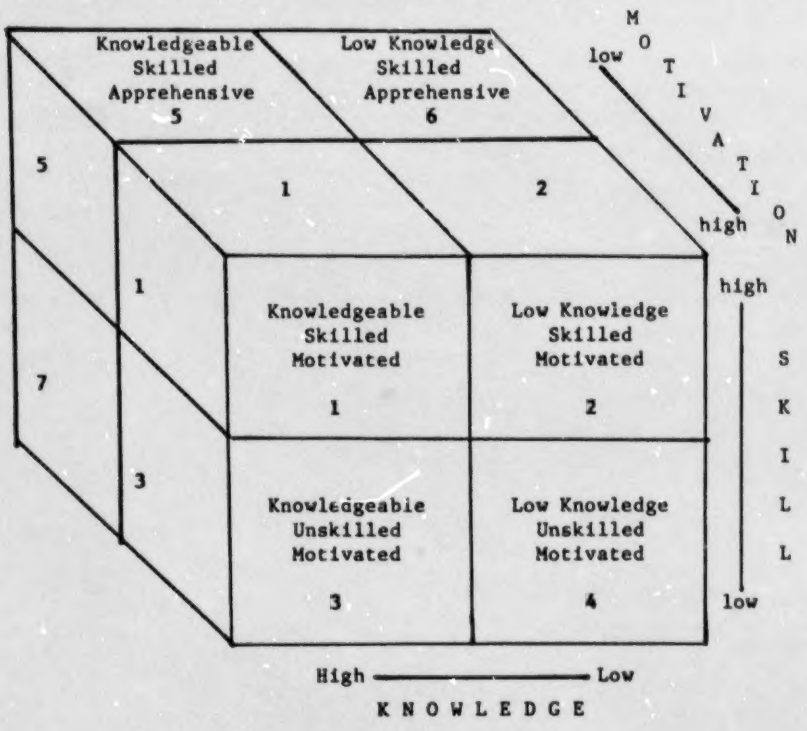
Implications for classroom instructional programs are found in Figure 1. In this cube, skill refers to observations of behavior, knowledge, to inferred understanding of why one is acting as one is, and motivation to the degree of approach or avoidance of acting in a communication situation. Knowledge of why one is communicating as one does is inferred from behaviors. We assume that those with more knowledge will have higher skill levels (quadrants 1 & 5), but this assumption is not always true. Table 5 breaks down the students in this study by knowledge and motivation on skill demonstration. As seen in the table, some students do not conform to perfect correlation expectations.

TABLE 5

CHI-SQUARE ANALYSIS FOR SKILL, MOTIVATION, AND KNOWLEDGE

	Knowledge		Apprehension	
Skill	Low	High	Low	High
Low	13	6	8	11
High	7	15	13	9
	$X^2 = 4.10$ df = 1 C = .34 $p < .05$		$X^2 = 0.60$ df = 1 C = .17 ns	

Figure 1. Dimensions of Communication Competence



Source: R. B. Rubin, Improving Speaking and Listening Skills. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1983, p. 99.

Applying this knowledge to the instructional scene, students may have high knowledge, motivation, and skill; instruction would be reinforcing for these students. For students lacking in the knowledge component (quadrants 2, 4, 6, & 8), classes focusing on understanding basic principles behind communication would be beneficial. Knowledge, presumably, aids in the act of communication (as demonstrated in this study) and provides a basis for choosing one means of communicating rather than another. Students with low levels of knowledge may or may not be perceived as communicatively competent. Skillful performance, without the knowledge base, is commonly referred to as "natural talent". I'm

sure we've all had students who speak well, but do not know why the communication is effective (quadrant 2). It is important to understand that knowledge is a somewhat necessary, but not sufficient, condition for impressions of communication competence. Those also low in motivation (quadrant 6) would seem to need some additional help in managing apprehension.

Motivation is also a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for impressions of communication competence. One must be motivated to learn about communication, to develop the ability to communicate, and to use one's knowledge and skills in actual performance (see McCroskey's affective dimension). Should this motivation be deficient (quadrants 5-8), an individual may not appear as effective as his or her potential allows. Thus, skill, motivation and knowledge are three identifiable components of communication competence. An individual can be deficient in any one or all of these components. Performance tests assess skills and allow impressions of communication competence to be made. Knowledge and motivation tests fill in the picture.

This study demonstrates the necessity of examining knowledge, motivation, and behavior in combination. Also, it provides for a more complete understanding of how impressions of communication competence are achieved. To equate communication competence with knowledge is like proposing that source credibility is an individual trait. Competence must be examined in context and the rules, norms and laws governing the context must be examined to understand how these impressions are formed. Implications are far-reaching for organizational settings, relationships, and instructional programs.

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